Married Women's Surnames

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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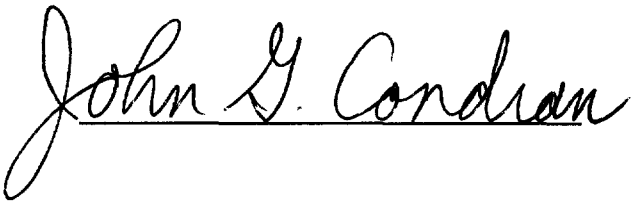

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I. History and Law of Names and Married Women's Surnames

Una Stannard, in Mrs. Man, writes:

> The history of married women's names is as much the history of men as of women, of men's desire to make and keep women wives and of women's inability for thousands of years to have any other role (Stannard 2).

While the legal name of a person now consists of a given name and a surname, this has not always been the case. In Western civilizations, the introduction of a second name to facilitate identification occurred as population increased, sometime after the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. This 11th-century movement was evident not only in England, but throughout the more populous countries of Europe as it became more and more difficult to identify an individual who had only one name (Mead 244).

It was not until the reign of Henry VIII, however, that surnames became common. Coupled with the rise in the general population, the influence of the Christian church deepened. The Christian church dictated that its members give their children Christian names derived from the list of canonized saints, of which there are relatively few. Thus, there were many children with the same Christian name. Some means had to be devised to differentiate among them; hence, the development of the surname (Stannard 112).

As the surname evolved into custom, it became a part of English common law . Accordingly, anyone could assume a surname through the mere use of it, provided that they were not doing so as a means of deception or for fraudulent purposes. Further, a person was not required to retain his or her birth name and could change it without the necessity of court proceedings (MacDougall 4).

Much of our existing laws are derivatives of English common law, which was adopted by all the states after the Revolution as the basis of their legal system (Mead 244). However, despite the common law right to adopt the name of one's choice, married women in the United States have been met with resistance when attempting to retain their maiden names. In her article in the Buffalo Law Review entitled "Married Woman's Right to her Maiden Name: The Possibilities for Change," Linda J. Mead explains this resistance by reporting the disagreement among authorities as to what the applicable common law is concerning married women:

> Some authorities insist that although taking the husband's name was customary, it was always optional. Others claim that the common law treated the husband's surname as the married woman's legal name (Mead 244-5).

Common law is a form of jurisprudence based on long-standing customs and found only in the records of judicial decisions and some legal treatises. They provide precedents for judges to apply in similar situations. William Blackstone, in his Commentaries on the Laws of England, provided the first comprehensible discussion of these unwritten codes of the English legal system (Wortman 14).

According to which position is taken, the ramifications upon a woman's right to her own name differ. Mead continues:

> If a married woman is not obligated to take her husband's name, her rights to her name are necessarily the same as that of any other person; that is, she can change it through usage. But, if a married woman is obligated to adopt her husband's surname as her legal name, she may not regain the right to use her maiden name extrajudicially (Mead 244-5).

Those who purport that English common law has never required married women to assume their husbands' surnames cite books written on English law as uniformly stating so. Una Stannard, in Married Women v. Husbands' Names: The Case for Wives who Keep their Own Name, writes:

> Says Halsbury's Laws of England: "When a woman on her marriage assumes, as she usually does in England, the surname of her husband in substitution for her father's name, it may be said that she acquires a new name by repute. The change of name is in fact, rather than in law, a consequence of the marriage. . .On her second marriage there is nothing in point of law to prevent her from retaining her first husband's name." J.F. Josling in his Change of Name (London, 1950), says that "though it is an almost universal custom for a married woman to be known by her husband's surname, it is quite open to her to retain her maiden name if she wishes." M. Turner-Samuels in The Law of Married Women (London, 1957) similarly states: "In England, custom has long since ordained that a married woman takes her husband's name. This practice is not invariable; nor compellable by law. It has no statutory authority or force."

On the other hand, those who maintain that English common law dictates that the husband's surname becomes the woman's legal name upon marriage use the concept of the "feme covert" and the common-law-defined relationship between

husband and wife as evidence. Under common law, a woman lost her legal identity upon marriage, for it was assumed that the husband and wife became one. William Blackstone intimates this view in his Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765):

> By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs every thing; and is therefore called in our law-French a feme-covert. . .or under the protection and influence of her husband, her baron or lord; and her condition during her marriage is called her coverture. . .although our law in general considers man and wife as one person, yet there are some instances in which she is separately considered; as inferior to him, and acting by his compulsion (Wortman 28).

Still, others are adamant that English common law does not require married women to adopt their husbands' surnames. According to Una Stannard, this is evidenced by the fact that English courts have consistently decided in favor of married women seeking to choose their own names. In bold-faced, capital letters on the inside cover of her book entitled Married Women v. Husband's Names: The Case for Wives who Keep their Own Name, Stannard includes:

> A WOMAN'S NAME IS NOT AS A MATTER OF LAW CHANGED TO HER HUSBAND'S WHEN SHE MARRIES. HER NAME IS CHANGED ONLY BECAUSE SHE CHOOSES TO CHANGE IT AND SHE NEED NOT CHANGE IT.

The origins of the custom of a married woman changing her surname for that of her husband are not as readily

traceable in history as are those of the customary use of surnames. Stannard says that inquiries into the beginnings of this custom were initiated in 1887 and were conclusive insofar as only to reveal that the custom was of fairly recent origin and varied from country to country (Stannard 151-152). She maintains, however, that in both the United States and England it was not at all uncommon until well into the 17th century for a woman to continue to use her maiden name after marriage and cites numerous examples (Stannard 114-115).

Lucy Stone chose to keep her maiden name in 1855 when she married Henry B. Blackwell. She was among the first American women to do so. Yet, when she attempted to vote in a school election in 1879, she was denied her right to do so in the name she had used exclusively for sixty years. The Boston Board of Registrars insisted that she could vote only if she signed her name Lucy Blackwell (MacDougall 5).

In 1921 the Lucy Stone League was formed by American feminists headed by the New York journalist, Ruth Hale (Stannard 5). The Lucy Stone League, aimed at establishing the legal right of a married woman to use her own name, and the National Woman's Party led a vigorous and successful fight in the 1920's to secure in America the common law right of married women to retain their own surnames (MacDougall 5).

Since the struggles in the 1920's, there have been relatively few cases regarding women's use of their birth-given names after marriage. However, decisions on recent cases indicate that there still exist misunderstandings about the common law right of married women to retain their own names and that American case law does not consistently follow the English common law (MacDougall 7).

Now there are no state laws which require a wife to assume her husband's surname. Nevertheless, the courts and our legal system treat a married woman as though she has automatically taken the name of the man she marries (Hemphill & Hemphill 121). The Center for a Woman's Own Name advises married women who wish to determine their own names after marriage to "systematically amass as much identification in the new [chosen] name as possible" to evidence to government officials that the chosen name is indeed the proper form of identification.

The Center informs us that changing one's name at the time of marriage is an example of a common law change of name. Likewise, even if she assumes her husband's surname at marriage, a woman can revert to her own name, take another name, or hyphenate her name with her husband's without formal court proceedings. This is also a common law change of name (The Center for a Woman's Own Name 11).

At present, the legal consensus is that a woman may retain her maiden name or choose some other naming method

upon marriage by way of the common law right to assume any name that one wishes to assume. It is recognized, however, that while a woman will probably not experience difficulty changing her name to that of her husband's upon marriage, she may be confronted with resistance when asserting her right to do otherwise (i.e. to retain her maiden name, take another name, or hyphenate her name with her husband's).

II. Psychological Significance of Names

"What's in a name?" is a question that women who do not wish to alter their names upon marriage are frequently asked. The questioned has been answered, however, by many psychologists and social psychologists; and, it has been established that there is in a name a great deal of significance.

Social psychologists maintain that our names are significant in terms of our patterns of interaction and how we feel about ourselves. They let us, as well as others, know that we are uniquely individual and significant:

> The very production of one's name signals that the transactions about to transpire are taking place between uniquely identified individuals rather than interchangeable role incumbents (Drury & McCarthy 310).

And, most significantly, names are crucial to our identities:

> The manner of its [one's name] presentation specifies the range of types of person one is claiming to be or

> being pressured to be by others. Thus each of us has a repertoire of name labels, surnames, forenames, nicknames, and titles, which in varying contexts and combinations can communicate a rather broad range of identities we wish to establish for ourselves. Introduced into interaction, these appellations announce to others and resonate to ourselves in a reflexive process who we are (or who we wish to see ourselves being) (Drury & McCarthy 310-311).

Researchers have also found a relationship between the characteristics of names and personality, behavior, and opportunity. Name dissatisfaction arising from peculiarity has been linked to emotional disturbance among male children and college students. Singular or uncommon forenames have predicted academic failure and neurotic behavior among college students. Further, Freud postulated that names as are central to the organization of personality. Others have found that one's given name is inextricably linked to career choices and opportunities (Drury & McCarthy 311).

The concept of mortification can also help us understand the significance of names. Mortification, a detaching process, involves the "submission of private states to social control, the exchanging of a former identity for one defined and formulated by the community" (Kanter 74). Mortification processes take place in religious communities and in total institutions in general. The purpose is to reduce all people to a common denominator so as to facilitate a group identity--a commitment to community rather than to

individual interests. Another intended consequence of mortification processes has been to strip away aspects of individuals' previous identities in order to make them dependent on authority for direction and to place them in a position of uncertainty with respect to their role behavior until they learn and come to accept the norms of the group (Kanter 103).

Nuns, for instance, are subjected to mortification in hopes that their commitment to God and the Church will be increased and that they will subordinate themselves and their desires completely to the goals of the religious community. One aspect of their mortification process includes the stripping away of their birth-given names. By assuming a new name, the woman affirms that she is no longer the person she was before and has become someone else with a new and, in this case, clearly defined role, purpose, and identity.

Likewise, women are expected to assume the names of their husbands upon marriage. In this process, we can assume by way of the definition of mortification that the woman may become more committed to the relationship for which she has sacrificed her life-long name, her identity. Her sense of self-determination may be subordinated to her awareness of the needs of her husband and family. And, since her identity has been so sacrificed, she may become dependent upon her husband for direction in terms of shaping her new identity as Wife.

On the significance of names, Una Stannard writes:

> "I did not want to give up my identity," is the first reason given by almost all women for having kept their own name. "My name = me" is one of the strongest feelings of children, a feeling males continue to have throughout life. Female children, on the other hand, are trained to want to give up their identity and acquire their husband's. . .Women who keep their own names. . .want to be themselves. They want a name that is not a label of wifehood but means "me" (Stannard 1).

And, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, at the Second Woman's Rights Convention in 1848, stated:

> A woman's dignity is equally involved in a life-long name, to mark her individuality. We cannot overestimate the demoralizing effect on women herself, to say nothing of society at large, for her to consent thus to merge her existence so wholly in that of another (The Center for a Woman's Own Name 19).

Because our names are so important, most authorities agree that it is likewise important that "each individual in an interaction situation be allowed to indicate a name preference and that others honor that preference" (Hence, in classrooms nicknames or truncated versions of given names are often used) (Drury & McCarthy 313). It follows, then, that the right of a woman to discard convention and not assume the surname of her husband be unabridged.

III. Implications and Symbolism

Many wives who have chosen to retain their maiden names or to adopt some other non-traditional pattern of naming have done so as a matter of principle. To some, the custom of a woman assuming the name of her husband is laden with

negative connotations; and, the act of a woman taking her husband's surname symbolizes many undesirable, misogynistic concepts.

Historically, to assume the husband's name--to submerge one's personal identity linguistically--epitomized the prevailing views regarding the relationship between husband and wife. According to English common law, the wife lost her existence when she entered into a marriage (Bander 45). In addition, the husband became entitled to his wife's services in the home without any obligation to compensate her. Although the wife who stays at home to clean, cook, mend, shop, raise children, and entertain her husband's business associates provides significant economic benefits to her husband, she was not entitled to any portion of his earnings or property under English common law (Ariel 2). Her labor belonged to him and was considered a logical component of her merged identity into her husband's (Scanzoni 299).

One way in which the wife's assumed merger into the husband can be symbolically represented is in the wife's taking of her husband's surname. She is, in name at least, no longer the person she has been up until the time of her marriage and may even be referred to as "the former Jane Doe." Her identity is especially obliterated in the "Mrs. John Doe" form, which ignores even her given name.

Furthermore, when a woman assumes her husband's surname, she is often accorded status merely by way of being "Mrs. So-and-So." Wives who do not want to "bask" in their husband's status and wish to be known for their own achievements often do not assume their husbands' names.

For a woman to take her husband's name has been likened to cattle-branding and regarded as remnant of the era when a wife was mere chattel, the legal property of her husband. Before marriage, a woman was considered to be under the control of her father, whose surname she bore. After marriage (at which time the father gives his daughter away to the groom) she becomes under the control of her husband, whose surname she adopts. Ruth Hale, co-founder and first president of the Lucy Stone League, commented on the symbolic nature of this custom:

> Custom said. . .that man owned what he paid for, and could put his name on everything for which he provided money. . .He put it on his land, his house, his wife and children. . .He liked it, he like it a lot. He won't give it up without a struggle, and why should he? But he is already civilized enough to disguise his reasons, and the time may come when he will be willing to let us have our names, symbols of our separate selves, partners with him in equal dignity, and sharing what we jointly choose to share (The Center for a Woman's Own Name 20).

While many women may not view this custom as such a conscious, deliberate attempt by men to oppress women, many agree with Hale in refusing to assume their husbands' surnames. These women do not want to suggest, symbolically even, that they are owned by their husbands;

and, they would like to disclose that their relationships consist of two separate, equal individuals.

This custom also epitomizes the view that women are valuable only insofar as they serve men as wives and mothers. So long as women have been wives, they have in some form or another always borne the label "wife of." Women who want to be regarded within roles in addition to or other than wife and mother have often discarded the label "wife of" (Stannard 1).

In addition, the custom of taking the husband's name perpetuates the sexual double standard which mandates that the world should know whether a woman is married or single, but that the marital status of a man is irrelevant. Women are forced to "explain" their children by wearing the name of their husbands (Stannard 2). Women who feel that a woman's sexual respectability should not depend upon bearing a husband's name may chose to retain their own names or form compound names at the time of marriage.

The custom of taking the husband's name is also a continuation of the ignorance of the principles of heredity which characterized society for thousands of years. Stannard writes of the symbolic significance of assuming the husband's name with respect to patrilineage:

> At the time when women began to take their husbands' names, they were not believed capable of carrying on life. Semen was believed to contain the only "seeds" of life, women being regarded as merely the brooders of men's life. A woman's assumption of her husband's

> surname signified she was the vehicle through which he was transmitting his life=name, or as women still say, "I bore his children." A woman did not pass on her name to children because she was not believed to have life to pass on. . .Now that woman's equal role in generation is at last understood, she eventually will not have to produce children under the name of a man, nor will children be given only the name of the father (Stannard 2).

Another implication of assuming the husband's surname concerns the wife's identity and self-concept. To assume her husband's last name, she is asserted to some extent that her self-esteem is low and that she feels herself inferior until she can call herself "Mrs. Someman." In addition, when she accepts his name, she suggests that she has ceased to live the life of an individual.

And, finally, by assuming the husband's name the wife is suggesting that his name, family genealogy, and ancestry are more important than hers.

IV. Examination of the Advantages and Disadvantages of Traditional and Alternative Naming Methods

As I have pointed out, some of the disadvantages of wives assuming their husbands' surnames relate to the symbolic implications. However, there are more concrete considerations to be examined.

Let us first consider the advantages of conforming to society's unwritten rule that says wives should adopt their husbands' surnames. First, conforming would allow a woman to avoid the vast array of negative responses she would

invariably receive from others: questioning, harassment, bewilderment, indignation, and disrespect. Second, all of the members of the family would have the same surname. And, third, the wife would not have to contend with the constant battle against the assumption that she changed her name to that of her husband.

On the other hand, there are also disadvantages to assuming the husband's name. By discarding their life-long name, wives become virtually invisible. They may detract from their own sense of identity, become less traceable in family history, become little known in the business/ professional world, and become harder to locate in general.

While society would seem to accord more rewards to the individual who conforms to tradition, there are rewards for those wives who opt to retain their maiden names or chose some other alternative to assuming the surnames of their husbands as well. Maintaing one's continuous identity is one of the primary rewards. And, since the average woman now gets married at least two times during her lifetime, this is even more significant for she does not have to change her identity with each marriage (Stannard 1).

In addition, breaking with tradition most likely indicates the partners' intentions to build a marriage that is satisfying to them rather than one that conforms to social norms. This can serve as a public statement about the

intentions of the parties to maintain an egalitarian relationship.

Furthermore, this disregard for custom can be beneficial to the wife's career. By continuing to work under her pre-married name, colleagues and employers may be more likely to consider her a career-committed person (Richardson 214). And, whatever recognition she has achieved up to that point does not have to be placed in jeopardy.

There are also some costs involved in the decision of a wife to reject convention, the most obvious of which is the confrontation with hostility. Ruth Hale wrote in 1922:

> A married woman who claims her own name is issuing a challenge. . .It is a defiance, and as such is dealt with by society, under a hundred euphemisms, always with hostility (Stannard 19).

And, Una Stannard adds:

> A rose by any other name may smell as sweet, but a wife by any other name than her husband's is offensive to men. And to the average woman, whose chief goal in life is still to transform herself from Miss Maiden to Mrs Man (Stannard 3).

Not only may non-traditionally named wives face open hostility, but they may suffer from more insidious behavior such as having their wishes concerning their names totally disregarded. This poses a particular problem for wives who have assumed hyphenated surnames. A woman who uses a hyphenated surname may discover that the name is not officially recognized and that few people respect the

hyphenation, frequently dropping one name or the other (Stannard 50).

Generally there are costs and rewards associated with all of the methods of naming; and, each person must figure for herself where her convictions lie. It is essential, however, that wives bear in mind that they are not legally obligated to assume their husbands' names. And, eventually, they may not even be socially compelled to do so.

VI. Results of Empirical Research

To shed some empirical light on this subject, a discussion of the results of a gender studies research project undertaken in the spring of 1990 will follow.

Stemming from a course on the sociology of women, a group of students under the direction of Dr. John Condran of the Sociology Department of Ball State University composed a questionnaire to explore gender-related issues. A survey was conducted wherein approximately six hundred students, mainly from introductory courses in sociology, participated. While this does not constitute a fully representative sample, a very diverse group of students completed the questionnaire.

The vast majority of the students who completed the questionnaire were freshman. At this age, there is no expectation of much development of original or non-conformist type attitudes for people are still very much products of

their early socialization. Hence, the fact that we find any deviations in our study is particularly significant.

According to our study, most people felt that women should adopt their husbands' last names at the time of marriage. Only 10% of our respondents felt otherwise. Moreover, the responses varied only slightly when they were crosstabulated with other items.

One factor which was related to people's preferences regarding married women's surnames was feminism. Just as the early feminists at the very first Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York in June, 1848 adopted the policy of using their own first names with no "Miss" or "Mrs." to indicate marital status, feminists of today are more likely to reject the traditional patterns of naming. Those people who indicated that they considered themselves to be feminists on most social and political issues were more likely to prefer that married women refuse to adopt their husbands' last names: 16% who claimed they were feminists preferred that married women keep their own names or form compound names while only 7% of those who said they were not feminists felt this way.

When examining the differences between the sexes on this issue, I found that a woman's declaration of feminism was more strongly linked with her attitude towards a married woman's surname than her male counterpart. Whereas 18% of

the women who agreed that they were feminists preferred that women keep their own names or form compound names upon marriage, only 9% of the men who said that they were feminists felt this way. Likewise, more men who said they were feminists accepted the traditional pattern of a women adopting her husband's surname than women who said they were feminists.

In addition to testing those "self-proclaimed" feminists, a "feminist index" was constructed to identify those people who, regardless of their response to the question which asked if they considered themselves to be feminist, seemed to be in agreement with some basic feminist principles and ideology. The index was created from the combination of responses to the following survey statements:

> A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work outside the home.
>
> It is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself.
>
> It is unfair the way women get special treatment for jobs in our society.
>
> Women are generally happier if they are in charge of the traditional female tasks in a household, such as, cooking, cleaning, laundry, and so forth.

According to disagreement or agreement with the above statements, the respondents were divided into four categories of feminism which represented their degree of commitment to or agreement with feminism and feminist ideals.

The correlation between the feminist index and the name changing item was significant. While still the majority of people indicated that they were going to adopt their husbands' surnames at the time of marriage or that they expected their wives to adopt their last names, those who appeared to be in agreement with feminism were more likely to prefer that women keep their own names or form compound names upon marriage. Respondents who appeared to be feminist were three times more likely to choose an alternate method of naming than were those who scored low on the feminism scale. The following table illustrates these observations:

	Degree of Feminism			
	Low	LoMed	HiMed	High
adopt husband's name	96%	91%	91%	83%
keep own or form compound name	4%	9%	9%	17%

When this crosstabulation is made sex salient, the results are interesting as well. The fact that a man agrees with feminism has no bearing on his attitude towards married women's last names; for, according to our study, the correlation between a male's rating on the feminist index and his response to the name changing item was insignificant. On the other hand, the relationship between a women's

identification with feminism (or lack thereof) and her attitude towards married women's last names was quite significant, as is illustrated in the following table:

	Degree of Feminism of Female Respondents			
	Low	LoMed	HiMed	High
keep own or form compound name	3%	6%	10%	20%

I also hypothesized that women would be more likely to reject the traditional pattern of a woman changing her surname upon marriage than men. My assumption was that equality of the sexes would be sought after by women more than men due to the loss of power the men would suffer as a result of greater equality between the sexes; hence, women would be more likely to prefer a more egalitarian method of identification for themselves upon marriage. And, since the issue is more directly related to women than men--since it is the women themselves who must give up their names--I felt that they would be more likely to reject the traditional pattern. However, the crosstabulation of these two variables deemed the hypothesis incorrect. The difference between the attitudes of men and women when it comes to this issue is so minute that one must conclude that there is no difference.

Another prediction that I made at the outset of our research concerned a person's religious affiliation or lack thereof and his or her attitude toward a married woman's last name. I hypothesized that those people who affiliated with no religion would be more likely to reject conventional forms of married women's surnames. It would seem that religious people would be more concerned with following tradition and would be more likely to agree with the notion that has been justified by reference to the bible: that women should be subservient to their husbands and should be willing to accept that their main duty in life is to serve men as wives and mothers. This would be congruent, then, to an agreement with the act of a woman changing her surname to that of her husband's upon marriage; for, a woman need not be identified in any way except in reference to her relationship with a man--as "wife of." After crosstabulating the variables, however, I had to reject this hypothesis for there was no relationship.

A hypothesis which turned out to be supported by the research concerned the relationship between people's attitudes towards married women's last names and whether their mothers worked outside of the home during their childhood. I predicted that those people whose mothers worked outside of the home most of the time during their adolescence would be more likely to reject convention and

choose alternate ways of handling the woman's surname in a marriage.

This hypothesis was based on the assumption that married women who work outside of the home are better able to achieve greater amounts of equality within their marriages for their relative economic equality makes possible important shifts in the couples' roles as husbands and wives. Since the organization of work determines both the financial position and the social status of family members, a working wife and mother may be able to realize more power and independence than a wife who is economically dependent upon her husband. In this environment, a child may perceive his mother and father as being more equal than if his or her mother's and father's working lives were separated into that of working for pay outside of the home and working without pay within the home.

After crosstabulating the variables, an existing relationship was found between the occupational situation of the respondent's mother during the his or her childhood and his or her attitude toward the issue of married women's surnames. Those people whose mothers worked full time almost all of the time during their childhood were almost twice as likely to prefer that married women keep their own names or form compound names as were those people whose mothers hardly worked outside of the home.

Another hypothesis of mine stated that those people who disagreed with the statement: "I often get guilt feelings when I stand up for what I think is right," would be more likely to reject the traditional pattern of women adopting their husbands' surnames upon marrying. I figured that those people who felt guilty when they asserted themselves would be afraid to be so bold as to reject their dearly beloved husbands' surnames. However, the crosstabulation of these variables resulted in no relationship; and, the hypothesis was rejected.

A factor which was deemed significant in light of statistical analysis, on the other hand, was that which dealt with attitudes concerning "who pays" in dating situations. Those who felt most comfortable when the expenses were shared were twice as likely to prefer that married women keep their own surnames or form compound names. The results supported my original hypothesis, which was based upon the assumption that those people who would rather share expenses in dating situations would be those people who are more independent and more supportive of egalitarian relationships between women and men. Thus, accordingly, they would be more apt to choose greater independence within marriage and more egalitarian methods of naming.

As previously discussed, when a woman takes the surname of her husband upon marriage she reveals to some extent her

view of her independence and identity. A woman's dignity, just like that of others, is involved in a life-long name, to mark her individuality. Thus, it follows that the more dependent a woman is and the less realized is her identity, the more likely she will readily adopt her husband's surname upon marriage. To further explore this hypothesis dealing with the relationship between a person's degree of independence and his or her attitude towards married women's surnames, an "independence index" was constructed. The responses from the following survey statements were combined to create the index:

> In the relationship that I am in now, or my most recent relationship, I am free to have a social life outside the relationship.
>
> I easily become dependent in an emotionally intimate relationship.
>
> When I am in love, I usually get so caught up in the relationship that I lose contact with my friends.
>
> I would be happier if I spent more of my free time with my spouse/boyfriend/girlfriend.

According to the respondents' agreement or disagreement with the statements, three categories were constructed which represent the respondents' degree of independence/dependence. The variations were very close, but there were some small distinctions as you may note:

	Degree of Independence		
	Low	Med	High
adopt husband's name	93%	90%	89%
keep own or form compound name	7%	10%	11%

For instance, 93% of those who appeared to be dependent indicated that they accepted the tradition that a woman change her last name upon marriage while a slightly smaller percentage (89%) of those respondents who appeared to be more independent did so. And, respondents who seemed to be more independent were almost twice as likely to prefer that women keep their own names or form compound names than were those respondents who seemed to be more dependent.

Upon making this crosstabulation sex salient, I found that the relationship between the independence of female respondents and their attitudes toward married women's surnames was inversely related to that relationship among men. The significance of independence or dependence upon a woman's choice of handling her last name upon marriage is illustrated in the following table:

Degree of Independence of Female Respondents

	Low	Med	High
adopt husband's name	94%	90%	86%
keep own or form compound name	5%	10%	15%

In constrast, there is an opposite relationship between a male's independence and his attitude toward the issue of a wife's last name. While a lack of dependency among women predicts that they will more likely reject the custom wherein wives take their husbands' names, a lack of dependency in men predicts that they will more likely prefer the custom. The following table illustrates this point:

Degree of Independence of Male Respondents

	Low	Med	High
adopt husband's name	91%	91%	96%
keep own or form compound name	9%	9%	4%

Another hypothesis stated that those people who were more "liberal" than others would be more likely to reject convention and prefer that women keep their own names or form compound names upon marriage. People who hold fast to

traditional values believe still in the strict polarized gender roles that have characterized our society for many decades. They support the traditional separation of women's spheres and men's spheres and relegate women to the role of wife and mother, with men being the achievers outside of the home. In light of these beliefs, it would follow that those same people would support and prefer that women adopt their husbands' surnames upon marriage.

To test this hypothesis, a "liberal index" was created which was used to determine whether a person was liberal, traditional, or somewhere in between the two. The survey items which relate to working mothers, AIDS, homosexuality, cohabitation, and interracial relationships were combined to form the index.

The following table illustrates the results of cross-tabulating the liberal index with the name change item:

	Degree of "Liberalism"			
	Low	LoMed	HiMed	High
adopt husband's name	94%	92%	88%	87%
keep own or form compound name	6%	8%	12%	13%

The distinctions are minimal, but it can be argued that the more liberal, the more likely one is to choose an alternate

form of a married woman's name; and, the more traditional, the more one is likely to prefer that women adopt their husband's surnames at marriage.

This study illustrates that generally, people--both male and female--support the tradition whereby women change their surnames to that of their husbands upon marriage; and, as a point of interest, most women still use titles which effectively disclose to the world their marital status and refer to them only in terms of their relationship (or lack of relationship) to males. Only a minority of people have strayed from these views and sought alternate methods for addressing women--addressing women as autonomous and independent.

VI. Conclusion

Starting about the thirteenth century, women informed the world they were married by changing their surnames to their husband's. And, for identification, a woman needed only the name of the man for whom she was performing the job of wife. Implicit in this form of address is a woman's wifely nonentity--her total absorption into the role of wife and into the life of her husband. In this process, women lose their names and become identified with the husband's family; the wife's family becomes not as readily traceable in history as her husband's; and, she becomes little known to

the business world. Moreover, women sacrifice their own identity when they become one with their husbands in name.

With women struggling to have other occupations besides that of wife, there would seem to be more women rejecting convention and discarding the label "wife of." However, our research indicates otherwise. Further research into the reasons women give for chosing to change their names upon marriage would be very useful.

A number of aspects could be explored, including an investigation of what bearing early socialization has upon a woman's decision. She recognizes the differences between the names of her grandparents; she witnesses her mother and sisters changing their names; she hears her parents urge her brothers to have children. Perhaps women, because of their early socialization, learn not to value their names as much as men; or, perhaps they detach their identities from their names so as to protect themselves from the eventual name change.

Another aspect which could be explored is the relationship between the romantic tradition and the choice of a woman to adopt her husband's name. Many women have related to me their feeling that changing their name upon marriage would be (or was) romantic, "sweet," "special." Perhaps the romantic definition of love, which says that lovers become

one or feel a sense of "oneness," implies that the custom of adopting the husband's surname is appropriate.

Others intimated to me that adopting their husbands' last name was for them a source of pride. It would be interesting to explore in what respect a sense of pride can be derived from adopting another's name. Perhaps this sense of pride stems from the fact that the woman feels she has "caught" the man. In the competition with other women, she has been victorious in gaining his indivisible affection.

As women gain more equality and freedom from the definitions of men, there is hope that they will begin in more and more numbers to resist the pressures of society which encourage them to exist for men. When this time comes, every woman may have so profound a sense of self-respect, self-worth, and self-determination that she will no more think of giving up her identity when she marries than men do today.

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